A Community Media Network Publication

January 1999

Tracking

ALTERNATIVE PRINT REPORT

editorial

Although alternative print is often perceived as being entirely hostile, or in opposition to the mainstream press, this need not be the only understanding of its raison d'etre. In fact, many alternative community based magazines and newspapers exist primarily because they provide their readers with something more than that which is considered newsworthy by the mainstream press. This alternative to market-led agenda or the demands of advertisers value in reporting on issues, opinions and community activity rarely covered by the mainstream and, most importantly, it seeks to incorporate an element of access or participation by its community of interest that is unthinkable in the mainstream press.

Which leads us to the buzz word: empowerment. Can the alternative press empower people? Certainly it cannot achieve this simply by virtue of the fact that it has the label, 'alternative'. And as Eamon McCann suggests, there could be sinister motives behind the capitalist establishment's sponsorship of community media, which may actually aim to dilute its radical purpose. Nonetheless, for those interested in representing the reality of most people's lives, for those arguing for a more egalitarian society and for those calling for freedom of expression, the question remains: how can we bring about change in our social structures?

In answer to this, the phrase 'physician heal thy self' springs to mind. According to Laurence Cox, the problem lies within, that is, within ourselves and within our autonomous alternative movements. The biggest problem being a lack of strategic thinking about where we are going as an alternative movement, and of one-way communication. In his article, 'Much Information, Little Communication' Cox proposes that the alternative press has a role to play in solving these problems, and this should be to create a forum for communication. He believes that the alternative press should get people talking 'to' as opposed to 'at' each other about the problems and aims of the alternative social movement. And there are many of them, not least of which are: what is the purpose of the alternative movement, what direction should it be going in, and how can its goals be achieved?

In the meantime, this report presents a birds-eye view of the diversity of alternative print currently produced in Ireland. The Bulletin contains a synopsis of twenty four magazines and newspapers that serve a wide variety of alternative interests and communities. There are of course many that we were unable to include due to the inevitable constraints of time and resources. In the Profile section we have given five alternative pulications the opportunity to express how they serve their commmunities. We have taken a broad view of the word 'alternative', one that encompasses an alternative worldview to that represented in the mainstream media. Not all of the publications would describe themselves as political, but in some sense, it is a political act to choose an alternative ideology. Hopefully, our choices represent a wide spectrum of alternative viewpoints.

Brenda McNally
On behalf of the Tracking team

REPORT FEATURE

Beyond the Dogma of Common Sense
The need for an alternative press 1
A Brief Histoy of the Radical Press 2
Don't Believe the Hype
Is alternative press alternative? 3
Much Information, Little Communication
Problems within the alternative press 4

PROFILES

The Only Alternative ?
Hot Press as an alternative publication 6
Full Expression
Profile of *Gay Community News* 7
The Revoluntionary Paper
Profile of *Socialist Worker* 8

THE BULLETIN

News Updates and an Irish guide to alternative print

When the Pen is Mightier Than The Pound
The role of the fanzine in popular culture 9
Changing Attitudes
Profile of *Voice Of The Traveller* 10
Daring To Be Radical
Profile of *Women's News* 11

VIEWPOINT

Are We Serious About Access ?
Assessment of community access 12

REVIEWS

Publish and be Damned
Review of the libel laws in Ireland 13
Developing Community Networks Using Technology
Review and update of the Cedis Project 14
The Video Activist Handbook 14
Empowerment Via Integra
Building Community Media Project update 15

INTERNATIONAL

Weapons of Mass Information
Amnesty and the power of the written word 16
One Million Signatures, One Powerful Message
The Amnesty 'Sign For Human Rights Campaign' 16

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Tracking has been produced by the participants on our C.E. Project for which FAS support is essential.
Naturally the views expressed in the report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of FAS ,CMN or other contributors

FAS Foras Áiseanna Saothair

Alternative/*awl'tuhnativ*/Print:*a(l)toun*:
1. Forms of media that unashamedly reject or challenge established and institutionalised politics, in that they all advocate change in society, or at least a critical reassessment of traditional values. 2. They are also referred to as Radical or Underground media and stand in opposition to mainstream productions by representing political and social doctrines that lie outside the defined limits of parliamentary consensus and debate. 3. *Community media may also be classed as an alternative in that they frequently represent groups who feel that their viewpoints and concerns are not sufficiently represented within existing local and national media.* 4. Often founded to campaign on one particular issue, alternative media face considerable problems of survival, given their tendency to be under-financed, and unattractive to advertisers and the mass commercial market.

Source: Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies, edited by John Fiske et al, Routledge Press, 1994

BEYOND THE DOGMA OF COMMON SENSE

Why do we need an alternative press? Is the mainstream press neutral and unbiased? How does ownership of the media influence editorial control? These are just some of the questions central to understanding the media machine and how it impacts on our lives. Joe Carolan, Activist and Lecturer in Media Studies at NCAD, takes a look at Noam Chomsky's revolutionary theories on media censorship.

In his seminal work on the American mass media, 'Manufacturing Consent', Noam Chomsky, Professor of Linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, examines how the internal structures of modern for-profit media corporations amount to a kind of permanent, institutionalised censorship.

Conformity is the easy way, and the path to privilege and prestige - dissidence carries personal costs that may be severe, even in a society that lacks such means of control as death squads, psychiatric prisons or camps. The very structure of the media is designed to introduce conformity to established doctrine. In a three-minute stretch between commercials, or in 700 words, it is impossible to present unfamiliar thoughts or surprising conclusions with the argument and evidence required to afford them some credibility. Regurgitation of welcome pieties face no such problem.

Here the form helps dictate the content, where the sound bite reinforcing 'consensus' wins out time and time again against the voices of opposition from the street, workplace or community. During the Gulf War, for example, the authorities seemed to have complete control over the flow of information. All reports had to be approved by the Army and journalists were not allowed to travel into the war zone unattended. The regurgitation here was one of a hi-tec, low casualty war, Patriot missiles and surgical strikes, with Saddam Hussein cast as the new Hitler. The few journalists with integrity like Robert Fisk, who reported the "turkey shoot" massacre of thousands of civilians fleeing carpet bombing on the road from Basra, were treated as outcasts by the authorities and the press pack for trying to be independent. The CNN and Sky News format largely ignored the slaughter of Iraqi civilians during the war, referring to their deaths as "collateral damage".

Chomsky argues that similar forms of discipline within the media are at work all the time. He argues that they serve the interests of dominant, elite groups in society, by setting the political agenda. They do this by first selecting which topics are paramount, by emphasising some opinions and framing others, by filtering the information available and by bounding the debate within certain, **consensual** limits.

What we have in the American media is in the first place major corporations which are part of even bigger conglomerates. Now, like any other corporation, they have a product, which they sell, to a market. The market is advertisers- that is, other businesses.

That means they want to adjust their audience to the more elite and affluent audience. That raises advertising rates...so, what point of view would you expect to come out of this? Without any further assumptions, what you'd predict is a picture and perception of the world that satisfies the interests and motives of the sellers, the buyers and the product.

Thus, economic affairs in our society are seen from the perspective of the Stock Exchange, not the dole queue.

MUCH INFORMATION, LITTLE COMMUNICATION

In a recent talk entitled, A Voice of our Own, Laurence Cox, Editor, An Caorthann examined the difficulties social movements face and discussed the need to think about strategies that work towards sustainability. He argued that the problem with the alternative movement is that it is "stuck in its own rut" and that the alternative press has a practical role to play by creating a forum for communication, as opposed to merely providing information about alternative movements. According to Cox, "a movement that ignores its own culture is organisationally unstable". Here we print an edited version of his talk.

The Editors

One reasons why alternative movements suffer from a lack of serious strategic thinking is that we have very few organisations, which are complex enough to have much space for this kind of thinking. So there is a paradox: you get an activism for activism's sake, without any real discussion of what it's all for, and it's not at all unusual for people in different branches to have thoroughly different ideas of what the point of the party is in the first place.

Building a movement culture means going beyond the barriers of each particular context. A movement culture should be about the synthesis of all these different little subcultures – so we need to bring them into contact and communication with each other. And this is where the alternative press should come in.

Much information, little communication

What should an alternative press be, if not a place for communication? And yet the weird thing is that it isn't. The word you hear most often isn't "communication" but "information". And the thing about information is that it doesn't imply any sort of connection between people.

In practice most of what we print is autistic communication: it is one-way communication, isolated people writing "at" never "to" – the rest of the world. We are happy printing what we think are facts about this or that. But we are not happy actually trying to make contact with the people who read us, trying to reach out to them, convince them, open ourselves up to them.

This is not unique to the alternative press; of course, it is a feature of the movement as a whole. We say "environment" or "ecology" or whatever, and assume that it means the same thing to other people as it does to us. The question rarely arises: why are we interested in this issue, right now? In a sense, we are caught up in our own symbolic language, rarely able to stand back from that language for a moment and place ourselves in the picture as the people who find one particular issue so important that we are prepared to devote most of our lives to it. So the alternative press basically replicates this model: many words, little content: much information, little communication.

The failure to connect

I have yet to see anything that could be honestly described as a "debate" within the Irish alternative press on any issue. This is painfully clear in our own attempts at networking. The alternative press can be brought together to talk about distribution, and how to cut costs: yet there is precious little interest in actually connecting with each other in terms of content. Even among ourselves there is no real sense of what an alternative press might be, how the different magazines might connect to one another, or what their role might be. So, like the rest of the movement, the alternative press remains stuck in its own rut. At the end of the day the business of writing, producing and distributing is so labour intensive that the last thing we want to do is think about what it's all for.

The isolation of the alternative press

The flip side of all this, of course, is that most people in the movement in practice see the alternative press as irrelevant to what they are doing. Trying to get articles about current campaigns is like trying to get blood out of a stone. It seems that most campaigners see the idea of information and discussion as beside the point. Why bother to let other people know what you're up to? What do you mean, step back and think about where we're going? So the alternative press suffers greatly from the pressure for results.

The alternative press is naturally a place where a movement identity is developed, and a movement culture is shared and deepened. It is naturally a place where skills are transmitted and where different people's understandings bounce off one another and become that bit more complex. It is naturally a source of motivation for campaigners and of mobilisation for campaigns. But in fact, it is anything but, because none of these figure on our mental maps of the world as in any way related to this all-important business of getting results.

So the alternative press is deeply isolated. The difficulty in the alternative press is that our isolation tends to privilege the autistic aspects of our communication. So, wherever we start from, there is a drift towards seeing oneself as a prophet in the wilderness. This is no good for the alternative press; it is no good for the movement; and it is no good for the individuals concerned.

I've said that we're all under pressure: the alternative press is under pressure, the movement is under pressure, and we find it difficult to get away from that pressure for long enough to think about where we're going and work towards sustainability. Why is this?

The institutions that operate in our lives are geared towards an economic system whose logic of accumulation and growth is the driving force behind ecological destruction and towards an authoritarian structure of power that is geared towards neutralising any challenges from below.

So we are deeply embedded in the institutions of a society geared towards the destruction we are trying to prevent. And when we come together as a "movement", this often means is that we come together around symbolic words like "ecology" or "environment". But the value of those symbols is that they cover over the enormous *differences* between us. If we are keener on giving out information "about" the environment than on thinking about what it actually means in practice to us, this is because we sense the risk of finding out that other people actually mean something completely different by it.

What this means, of course, is that we are failing to listen to each other. We are personally "into" a handful of issues, but we are very defensive towards the issues that other people in the movement are into. Far from exploring them in detail, we perceive *their* issues as threatening *our* consensus, and as making it impossible for us to push *our* issues onto the mainstream agenda. Other people will marginalise the movement, we say, by including irrelevant issues. Irrelevant, that is, to our own priorities.

A new role for the alternative press

What would it be like if we didn't operate in this way? It is possible that the alternative press might have a part to play. This would involve sharing and exchanging our experiences and our understandings and developing the directions we need to move in. The alternative press would have a key role to play by being an alternative "public space", a place where this learning process can actually happen. Because if one thing is certain, it is that this learning process is not going to happen on TV. If it is going to happen anywhere, we need to create the space in which this can happen.

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THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE?

The inclusion of *Hot Press* as representative of alternative literature may come as a surprise to those who regard it as a mainstream publication mainly concerned with promoting mainstream music. However, the inclusion of *Hot Press* as an alternative paper can be justified for two distinct reasons, writes Ken O'Duffy of *Tracking* magazine.

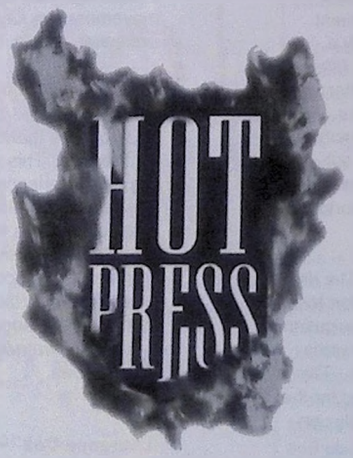
Firstly, a case can be made for its inclusion on the grounds that, for musicians and music fans in Ireland, Hot Press has been the '*only alternative*'. When *Hot Press* first hit the streets in 1977 it became the only Irish produced rock magazine, and twenty-one years later, and after the demise of other Irish music based publications, *Hot Press* still retains that distinction.

The arrival of *Hot Press* coincided with the rapid growth of the Irish rock music industry. The contribution *Hot Press* has made to the music business in Ireland is impossible to ignore, especially its attempts to nurture young Irish talent. From organising song-writing competitions, staging gigs, to hosting music seminars, *Hot Press* has attempted to promote new acts and raise awareness of the different (especially treacherous) areas of the business.

It has also acted as a voice for Irish musicians in a wider context. For example, in a recent editorial piece *Hot Press* expressed its concern about the new social welfare reforms being introduced by the FF/ PD government. *Hot Press* claimed that the Government's Employment Action Plan had the potential to force unemployed people under the age of twenty-five into areas of employment unsuitable to the aspirations of the individual concerned. *Hot Press* raised the problems such reforms would have on musicians who rely on social welfare as a way of allowing them concentrate on developing their talents unhindered, and called on the government to re-examine its proposals.

Of course one could argue that the mere existence of a publication - even if it is the only one in its field - does not necessarily justify its status as a radical organ. This leads me to the second way in which *Hot Press* can be considered 'alternative', namely through its often 'radical' presentation of political, social, cultural and sexual matters in contemporary Ireland.

Though primarily a music paper, the appeal and importance of *Hot Press* goes way beyond its relationship with the Irish and international music scenes: the first issue of the magazine offered an analysis of the 1977 Irish general election, and since then *Hot Press* has broadened its editorial range and concentrated on issues relevant to contemporary Irish society, especially those issues ignored by the mainstream media. In fact, an examination of the ethos of *Hot Press* over the past twenty-one years points to a publication which has reflected and encouraged the radical transformations in Irish society over that time.



caution: filling may be hot!

When *Hot Press* first came into existence homosexuality was illegal, divorce existed in Irish consciousness as a song by country star Tammy Wynette, and contraceptives had limited availability (indeed Irish people had just witnessed the extraordinary event of the then Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave voting against his own government's bill to introduce legislation on contraception). Over the past twenty-one years *Hot Press* has canvassed on behalf of the 'liberal' agenda which has forced the introduction of improved legislation on the above issues.

'When Hot Press first came into existence homosexuality was illegal, divorce existed in Irish consciousness as a song by country star Tammy Wynette, and contraceptives had limited availability'

An examination too of the editorial content of *Hot Press* reveals a publication which has often taken a radical (left-wing) view on matters ranging from policies on taxation to the role of the Church, and which has consistently highlighted the rights and needs of disadvantaged and oppressed groups and individuals.

Also special editions, features and supplements dedicated to such topics as drugs and sexuality have (besides giving a voice to a younger generation of Irish people) attempted to promote national and rational debate where often the mainstream media has either ignored such issues or resorted to hysteria when reporting them. For example, in one of his editorial columns, Niall Stokes proposed an argument for the legalisation of heroin. The 'Irish' *Daily Mirror* joined the debate - "HAS NIALL GONE MAD?", screamed the headline on *the Mirror's* front page.

Today *Hot Press* still includes Eamonn McCann and Nell McCafferty as forthnightly columnists. Both are regarded as two of the more radical voices in Irish life, a view which is reflected by their respective columns. Indeed, *Hot Press* has recently published *War and Peace In Northern Ireland*, a collection of McCann's contributions to *Hot Press* over the years, the result of which certainly offers an alternative interpretation of the Northern conflict.

FULL EXPRESSION

'*Gay Community News*'(*GCN*) status as a community publication is interesting in that it represents a community that is based on neither economics nor geography. Their readership come from completely divergent social, economic and educational backgrounds, they live in cities, small towns and rural areas, and can be teenagers or retired people. They are gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transsexuals. They cross the spectrum of cultural tastes and political views; they even have different ideas about what it means to be gay or lesbian, Michael Cronin, *GCN* explains.

What our readers share is a common experience of marginalisation, which comes from growing up in a society in which compulsory heterosexuality is still, explicitly or implicitly, enforced; where same-sex relations do not receive the same sanction, or are not valued as heterosexual relationships; where homophobic prejudice is still prevalent – prejudice which affects our community on many levels, from our relationships with our families to running the risk of violent attacks on the streets.

GCN is part of a network of groups and organisations, which have been the social and political response of lesbians and gay men to this prejudice and discrimination. 'Community', in the gay and lesbian context, is more of an ethos than an entity, and it is this ethos of community, which informs the work of projects like *GCN* and contributes to the structure of our organisation, which is not-for-profit.

GCN is a monthly newspaper, which has been published continuously since February 1988 and is available free of charge. Published by the National Lesbian and Gay Federation, the paper is a FAS funded Community Employment (CE) Scheme. It has a circulation of 12,000 and an estimated readership of 30,000. It is distributed in many bookshops, pubs, cafés, colleges and other 'gay-friendly' venues throughout the Republic and Northern Ireland, and has subscribers in Britain, Europe and North America. In content the paper divides into seven sections; news, features, health, lesbian life, arts, social and listings.

An important element of the CE scheme involves providing training for the participants. In the *GCN* scheme, however, there is the added dimension of providing a safe workspace in which people can be open about their sexual identity; this can be an important experience for lesbians and gay men at certain times in their lives.

In common with many such organisations *GCN* has a surfeit of one resource – people with energy, talents and skill – but a dearth of other resources – the materials, money and technologyneeded to allow that potential full expression.

' What our readers share is a common experience of marginalisation, which comes from growing up in a society in which compulsory heterosexuality is still, explicitly or implicitly, enforced; where same-sex relations do not receive the same sanction, or are not valued as heterosexual relationships '

Editorially, *GCN* places issues of importance to its constituency in the public discourse and so gives a voice to their experience. It provides a medium through which individual lesbians and gay men can have access to information, and gain a sense of being connected with each other. It also contributes a lesbian/gay/queer perspective on mainstream political and cultural life.

However, the need for advertising to fund production and distribution of the paper means that much of the paper, and a great deal of administrative and creative energy, is given over to advertising, as well as the inevitable pressures advertising places on the direction of the paper's style and content.

This leads to an interesting paradox: while the publication of the paper is of itself still a radical political act, in content and style *GCN* is, in many ways, indistinguishable from the mainstream media – politically cautious, market-oriented and celebrity and PR driven.

The multiplicity and diversity of visions and expectations however, also gives the paper an energy and dynamism that it can draw on to embrace its many roles and functions – as project, as service provider, as advocate - and contribute a valuable voice to public discourse in Ireland's increasingly diverse culture.

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THE REVOLUTIONARY PAPER

SWP

Socialist Worker **appears on the streets, in the housing estates and at the workplaces every fortnight. According to Kieran Allen, editor, it is very different to the conventional media in several striking ways. The paper is firstly an organiser. Day to day struggles of working people rarely find their voices in the mainstream press.**

Where they do appear they are often presented as 'industrial relations problems' or the result of a 'breakdown in understanding'.

Socialist Worker starts from the reality of class struggle and aims to see our side win. We try to both report the actions that workers take and also to advocate the best tactics that can win. So, we have given extensive coverage to the strikes in the building industry, openly encouraging workers to defy the Industrial Relations Act.

Secondly, the paper challenges the ideology of our rulers. The wealthy use both force and ideas to maintain their privilege. Most institutions from the schools to the mainstream media spread ideas which legitimises the rule of the business elite. Sometimes these ideas touch deeply on what it mean to be human - are we all supposed to be naturally greedy or aggressive!

Sometimes these ideas seek to disorganise and divide workers - think only of the hysteria about refugees. Socialist Worker aims to challenge the grip of these dominant ideas and offers facts and arguments to help resist them.

Thirdly, this can only be done from a wider tradition in the working class movement. Every time we fight, we do not start anew. As the scientist Newton once said, "we can only see further if we stand on the shoulders of giants."

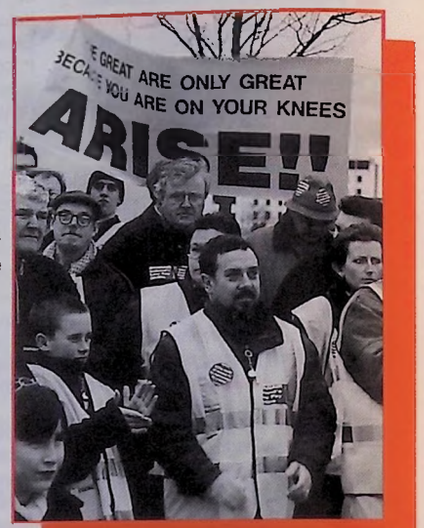
Socialist Worker aims to uncover and bring to a new generation the revolutionary tradition that has existed in the past. This often means longer articles on revolutionaries such as James Connolly or Rosa Luxemburg or it might mean looking at the hidden history of working class struggle.

The paper is openly partisan, arguing for a working class revolution to end the madness of the market. But, it will be asked, is this not mere propaganda- tabloid journalism with a political message? For 'objective' reporting don't we need a serious paper like *The Irish Times?*

Have you ever seen a headline in the conventional press such as 'Hopes rise that strike nears victory'? In the name of neutral reporting you are more likely to see headlines such as 'Strike places jobs in jeopardy'.

For socialists, there is no contradiction between being objective and being on the side of the working class. Those who pretend to be neutral and above class struggle give a more one sided slant on the news.

When have you ever seen a headline in the conventional press such as 'Hopes rise that strike nears victory'? In the name of neutral reporting you are more likely to see headlines such as 'Strike places jobs in jeopardy'.



Socialist Worker activists help Ryan Air strikers bring Dublin Airport to a standstill

A view on society from the standpoint of the working class means there are no commercial pressures. We do not worry about advertisers or how our economic reports might depress share prices.

Nor do we present a fragmented view of the world where the business pages argue that Ireland needs to cut taxes on corporate profits while the news section tells us that teachers are striking over the under- funding of schools. *Socialist Worker* aims instead to draw the links that are forged in a system that is bent on profit.

Finally, an invitation. *Socialist Worker* always wants to hear from those in struggle.

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CMN IRELAND BULLETIN #12

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ANTI-RACISM: AN IRISH PERSPECTIVE

HARMONY

A very welcome publication, ***Anti-Racism: An Irish Perspective,*** from Harmony Publications is expected to hit our book shelves around the end of 1998. The core exploration of the work, according to the Harmony group, is to examine the responsibility of the majority ethnic group (in the Irish context this constitutes the white settled majority) in relation to racism and anti-racism in Irish society. This analysis argues that it is the power of white privilege that allows forms of racism to go unchallenged and unchanged and recognises racism as a reality and anti-racism as challenging this reality.

The work also examines the role of government in relation to racial issues, and, interestingly, argues against the continued use of the term 'race' at academic and official levels on the basis that it is a social construct and perpetuates the idea of 'races' (for which there is no scientific basis).

There are suggestions for action and guides for choosing and accessing trainers, consultants and speakers along with lists of organisations, courses, internet, readings etc. Phone Marian Tannam @ (01) 492 5567

COMPUTER LEARNING AT THE OPEN LEARNING CENTRE

The open learning centre situated in the Illac Centre, Dublin offers a wide range of opportunities in computer learning for adults. It provides a structure of independent learning which accommodates adults, offering flexibility to set their own time scale and work at their own pace. There is access to a huge range of courses, and best of all - they're all **FREE.**

The courses include multi-media training, including access to selected levels of the internet, language learning with a choice of up to 50 languages to choose from, and access to computer skills through self learning packages which include word processing, spreadsheet and database.

Contact: The Open Learning Centre
Dublin Corporation Central Library
Illac Centre, Henry St., Dublin Ph (01) 8734333

ONE WORLD SOCIETY

Trinity College will be holding a series of multicultural activities from January, 26-29.These will include a food festival, an exhibition and debate. The aim of this event is to show that multiculturalism is an opportunity, not a disaster.
For further information contact the International Students Society, Trinity College, 087 2371403

ANARCHY IN THE U.K.

Three editors of *Green Anarchist* magazine were jailed in November 1997 for three years each. The state had brought charges against Noel Molland, Steve Booth and Saxon Wood of conspiracy to incite persons to commit criminal damage and arson, for publishing news of some of the wide range of direct actions by environmentalists and animal liberationists. "Many publications include coverage of direct action protests", said a spokesperson for *Green Anarchist*. "Catch all incitement and conspiracy charges threaten not only radical publications, but anyone making similar statements which could be interpreted as inflammatory". This case opens the way for similar attacks on any publication deemed to support such actions... We refuse to recognise laws which enable the powerful to censor and criminalise the dissemination of alternative points of view." The three were released in March when their lawyers put in a bail application for appeal, the date of which still remains to be fixed. Voices of support came from the NUJ's magazine *The Journalist, The Big Issue* (UK), the civil-rights group Liberty, and Noam Chomsky. Steve Booth on release said, "I was disappointed at the lack of coverage of the case in the mainstream- absolutely pathetic! The grassroots came through with the goods, and thank goodness for the internet. We've heard a rumour that the reason we've been let out was that Amnesty in the US were about to list us as political prisoners".

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The Voluntary Sector in the Information Age

A Recent submission to the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, for their white paper on voluntary activity on IT (Information Technology) in the community and voluntary sector, is based on the Dublin City University (DCU) school of communications research project, *The Voluntary Sector in the Information Age*' This submission is based on the experiences of the hundreds of Irish community and voluntary organisations who participated in the research.

The research attempts to represent a fair and accurate assessment of the key issues surrounding the use of IT in the community and voluntary sector.

More information can be found on DCU's web site: www.dcu.ie/staff/volsec.html

Broadcasting Legislation

The new proposed Broadcasting legislation from Síle de Valera's Department of Arts, Heritage, Gealtacht and the Islands is still being awaited. Early indications on the forthcoming legislation failed to focus on community media in any meaningful way (*Tracking*, summer 1998). The lobby group, of which CMN is affiliated, has presented proposals for the final drafting of the legislation urging a comprehensive definition of what community media actually is and strongly recommends the inclusion of the basic needs and rights of community media within the legislation.

The final draft is expected in Jan. 1999.

CMN Steering Committee: Chair: Sean O Siochrú, Terry Shine, Oliver McGinley, Damian Smyth (Belfast), Aiden Kenny, Agnita Ward, Seamus McGrenery, Dave Hyndman, Building Community Media Co-ordinator: Iris Lyle, Cedis Co-ordinator: Sinéad Casey, Project Co-ordinator: Margaret Gillan

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AN IRISH GUIDE TO Alternative print

An Caorthann:
Dedicated to 'green' news and politics and the promotion of alternative lifestyles.
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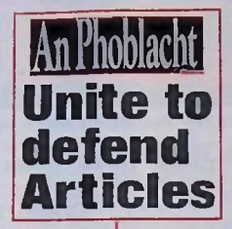
Centre For Research on Environment and Community, Campus, Waterford Institute of Tecnology,Waterford



An Phoblacht:
Weekly newspaper campaigning for a 32-county republic and reporting news and events relevant to the Republican movement.
Ph: (01) 8733611
Fax: (01) 8733074
e-mail: aprn@irlnet.com
58 Parnell Square,
Dublin 1

CAFE news:
Publicises and promotes the work of the Creative Activity For Everyone group and the work of other community arts groups and practitioners.
Ph: (01) 6770330
Fax: (01) 6713268
e-mail: cafe@connect.ie
The City Arts Centre,
23 Moss Street, Dublin 2

Catalyst:
Exists as a forum to stimulate debate and action on empowerment, ecological and evolutionary issues in contemporary Ireland.
Ph:(01) 4546309
Fax:(01) 4546407
e-mail: catalyst magazine@hotmail.com

New Connections:
Holistic journal dedicated to personal and social development of mind, body, emotions, spirit and sexuality.
Ph: (08) 01693 69635
e-mail: msob@connect.ie
35 Patrick Street,
Newry, Co. Down

Open House:
Newsletter produced by the Open House group, an independent and non profit organisation made up of lesbians, gay men and bi-sexuals living in rural Ireland.
PO Box 36 Mullingar
Co. Westmeath

Pobal an Dúlra:
'People of Nature' magazine dedicated to ecological and alternative lifestyles and issues.
Ph: (01) 6794207
e-mail: diarmo@indigo.ie
10 Camden Street,
Dublin 2

Socialist Worker:
Paper produced every fortnight by the Socialist Workers Party fighting for a socialist republic and international socialism.
Ph:(01) 8722682
www.clubi.ie/swp
e-mail: swp@clubi.ie
PO Box 1648, Dublin 8

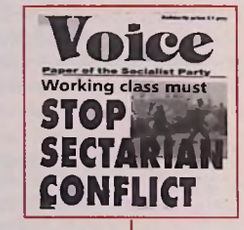
Earthwatch:
Quarterly Irish environmental magazine, concerned with international ecological issues.
Ph: (027) 50968
Fax: (027) 50545
e-mail:ewmag@tinet.ie
The Square, Bantry,
Co. Cork

Focus:
Produced by an editorial collective of volunteers. Focus aims at promoting global development through education and action.
Ph: (01)4783490
Fax: (01)4783738
Cómhlamh,
10 Upper Camden Street,
Dublin 2

Gay Community News:
Monthly newspaper that raises and promotes issues and events relevant to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community
Ph: (01) 6710939
Fax: (01) 6713549
e-mail: gcn@tinet.ie
6 South Williams Street,
Dublin 2

Harlot:
Cultural magazine written by and for women, *Harlot* focuses on issues and ideas surrounding the feminist movement.
Ph: (01) 6082335
Fax: (01) 6082656
Regent House,
Trinity College,
Dublin 2

Source:
The only photographic magazine produced and printed in Ireland, *Source* is dedicated to promoting the work of Ireland's photographers north and south of the border.
Ph/Fax: (08) 01232 329691
3 Botanic Avenue,
Belfast,
BT7 1JG

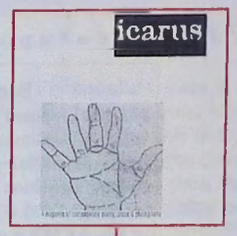


The Voice:
Monthly paper of the Socialist Party which acts as a voice for working class people.
Ph/Fax: (01) 6772686
e-mail: dublinsp@clubi.ie
PO Box 3434, Dublin 8

Voice of the Refugees:
Newsletter of the Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland which raises and promotes human and civil rights issues.
213 North Circular Road,
Phibsboro, Dublin 7.
Ph: (01) 8381142

Voice of the Traveller:
Dedicated to reporting and promoting events and happenings in the travelling community.
Ph: (042) 26246
086-812 4011
Unit 24a Williamsons Mall, Francis Street,
Dundalk,
Co. Louth

Harmony News:
First Irish inter-racial newsletter promoting a multi-cultural Ireland and covering Harmony social events.
Ph: (01) 2832302
41 Morehampton Road,
Donnybrook,
Dublin 4



Icarus:
Provides an accessible medium for new poetry, prose and photography north and south of the border.
Ph: (01) 6082335
Fax: (01) 6082656
Regent House,
Trinity College,
Dublin 2

Irish Anti-Vivisection Society Newsletter
Quarterly magazine campaigning against animal experimentation on scientific and moral grounds.
PC Box 13
Greystones
Co. Wicklow

Moving Arts:
Arts and media magazine produced by a cross-border group established with the intention of promoting the arts among young people.
Ph: (047) 71996
e-mail:
movingarts@tinet.ie
41 Beech Grove,
Monaghan,Co. Monaghan

Women's News:
Feminist collective which produces and provides a forum for communication between women, for women.
Ph: (08) 01232 322823
Fax: 438788
e-mail:
womensnews@dnet.co.uk
30 Donegal Street,
Belfast 1

Workers Solidarity:
An Irish anarchist paper produced by the Workers Solidarity Movement promoting a 32 county Workers' Republic.
PO Box 1528,Dublin 8
http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/html

The above magazines were selected randomly from a cross-section of political, cultural, environmental, racial and gender/ sexuality based publications.

Selected/ edited and designed by the *Tracking* Team, for the *Tracking* report on Alternative Print.

Tracking:
Quarterly magazine facilitating democratic access to the media and promoting community empowerment.
Ph: (01) 8783144
Fax: (01) 8783206
e-mail: tracken@iol.ie
34 North Frederick Street
Dublin 1

ALTERNATIVE PRESS ARCHIVE PROPOSAL - LAURENCE COX

Despite the existence of many alternative/environmental magazines in Ireland, no archive of this material exists anywhere at present. Such an archive would be of value to researchers in the rapidly developing study of the environment and environmental movements (particularly from the point of view of the humanities), as well as to interested members of the public, in particular those involved in environmental issues.

Justification: The primary justification for this archive, then, is for research purposes. In particular, it would be hoped to attract postgraduate students with an interest in researching this material. For similar reasons, the archive could provide the basis for research by members of WIT (Waterford Institute of Technology) staff or for dissertations by WIT undergraduates. It would also in all probability attract interest from outside researchers.

A secondary justification is naturally that this archive is a felt need on the part of the magazines involved themselves, and one that has been expressed to me several times. In keeping with WIT's brief of involvement with and response to the needs of the community, and especially the Centre for Research on Environment and Community's brief to provide among other things an academic resource for environmental and community groups, this seems a worthwhile project and othat could attract a certain amount of interest from the mainstream media as well.

Principles of Inclusion: The category "alternative/ environmental press" is obviously a loose one. However, the Centre for Research on Environment and Community has concentrated on those magazines which are characterised by being explicitly environmental (many are the house publications of environmental organisations) or relating to broader cultural issues that are directly related to the environmental movement or to alternative lifestyles. If the current project is a success, it might be worth considering developing the archive into relevant areas not currently included. In particular, earlier alternative/ environmental magazines (if they can still be come by), and the magazines of related social movements (especially perhaps the community development and women's movements) might be worthwhile additions at some future stage.

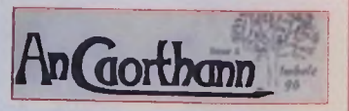
Location/ Accessibility: Various proposals have been made for the physical location of this collection. I do not have any strong personal views on this question; the main point is that the collection be physically secure, in a location conducive to research, and accessible both to students of WIT and to members of the public. Whatever physical solution is chosen, there is also the suggestion this material could be scanned and made available in electronic forms such as the World Wide Web, thus making the material available to international researchers.

Conclusion: The proposed archive is both desirable and feasible. The main issues needing decision or approval are those relating to location and funding. I hope to be in a position to make a costing for these acquisitions in the near future. Perhaps at that point it will also be possible to agree on a location, if the overall proposal finds approval. It should also be mentioned that the Centre for Research on Environent and Community is also looking for a part-time postgraduate for an M.A. or PhD; anyone interested should contact the address below.

TRIBAL GATHERING... ALTERNATIVE PRINT WORKSHOP

Laurence Cox, lecturer at the Waterford Institute of Technology, and part of the editorial team of *An Caorthann* magazine, is currently examining the possibility of holding a workshop in the new year for those involved in the area of alternative print. Cox, who has previously held such workshops, believes a gathering of those involved in the area of alternative print is of some importance due to the kinds of problems alternative publications are facing right now (magazines folding, problems with distribution etc.). Cox is also interested in inviting individuals from the Third World development media, the political press and the small music press scene to add their voice to the discussions. If you are interested in attending the proposed workshop, or require further information, please contact Laurence Cox at the address below.

Laurence Cox
Centre for Research on Environment and Community
College St, Campus, Waterford Institute of Technology
Waterford, Rep. of Ireland.
Ph: (051) 302257
email:lcox@staffmailwit.ie



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Bulletin 12 **has been researched and designed by Joe Carolan, Ken O'Duffy, Ciarán Ó hUltachain, Irene Quinn**

WHEN THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE POUND

Leagues takes a look at the growing pains of the much-maligned fanzine and argues that since they have played a pivotal role as a vehicle for sub-culture, surely now is the time to give them a place in the lexicon of alternative print.

Initially, as specific vehicles of adornment for one particular pop act, movie star or football team, Fanzines were all about mutual appreciation and interaction between the subject's followers - magazines written for fans by fans.

Though they sometimes descended to a 'trainspotting' mentality, fanzines also acted as true alternatives to the mainstream press. Often the fanzine covered what the mainstream press chose to ignore, or reflected the views of the fan in a way that a mainstream publication could never truly articulate. In fact, for many fanzine readers, especially in the area of pop music, the appearance of one's heroes in a mainstream publication spelled the end of their magical appeal. As such, the fanzine served an intimate community of interest, the fanzine a secret that one shares only with one's best friend.

It was the emergence of punk rock in mid-late 70's Britain that really opened the floodgates for fanzines and free-sheets as a more aggressively cultural and political voice of the younger generation. Who would have thought that the nasty, angst-ridden, inspired racket of The Sex Pistols would have sprung such an influential lineage? And yet it did, by bringing home the message that Punk amounted to more than just a mob of glue-sniffing androids yelling "Anarchy in the UK". The punk scene and its mantra that imagination and enthusiasm mattered more than technical competence had a massive influence on the area of alternative print and resulted in a flood of shoestring budget, cut 'n' paste publications.

As alternative culture unfolded over the next decade and independent record labels came to the fore, fanzines represented the views of the non-industry or DIY industry domain and they became important bedfellows.

Fanzine culture didn't hit me until 1989. I was an 18-year-old with a Stone Roses album under my arm in Dublin's Freebird Records, a trove of mysterious delights that equally dazzled and frustrated someone with a budget for one album a week and maybe enough left over for the *NME*. My knight in shining armour came in the form of a shoddily typed, cheaply photocopied free sheet entitled *React*, which temptingly lay on the counter amidst a pile of equally graphically challenged gig flyers.

React edited by Northside Dubliner Niall McGuirk changed everything. Paltry in appearance, this publication was validated by its energised content, an inspired bounty of information on other intriguing literature and musical events and a community forum for the colourful opinions of music fans. And it didn't cost a penny!

React practically planned my diary for the next two or three years and this strange phenomenon of DIY Culture had consumed another hapless patron. After awhile I became a regular contributor and eventually I was producing cut 'n' paste epiphanies of my own before I went on to contribute to Dublin's most prominent free sheet, *the Dublin Event Guide*, an established nationwide publication in itself, now titled *The Event Guide*.

Niall McGuirk, himself a fervent Bray Wanderers supporter and avid reader of footie zines such as the infamous *When Saturday Comes*, went on to produce *No Way Referee*, continuing to forge those umbilical links between pop music and football. The legacy of free sheets and fanzines in Dublin lives on to this very day (check out *Slanted & Enchanted*), now augmented by the more streamlined potency of the Internet. And you still won't find a small record shop in Dublin without these noisy organs cluttering up the counter.

Leagues is a freelance journalist with *DSide* and a music columnist with The *Event Guide*.

Under*currents*, the alternative news video is based in Britain but aims to get an audience for important environmental and social justice issues all over the world.

Our ninth issue is out now and includes a feature on the Glen of the Downs anti-motorway protest in Wicklow

Contact us at Under*currents*, 16b Cherwell St, Oxford, OX4 1BG, England, phone: 0044 1865 203662, www.gn.apc.org/www.undercurrents.org

undercurrents

CHANGING ATTITUDES

When initiated in 1992 the *Voice of the Traveller* featured news, photographs and information from trainees within the Traveller centres, but it was a Traveller-centre based publication only. One of the areas that needed development was how the magazine could be utilised as a community media resource for the Travelling community as a whole. Winnie McDonagh, magazine co-ordinator, describes how far they have come in achieving this aim.

The *Voice of the Traveller* magazine is a project of the National Association of Traveller Training Centres (NATC) - the administrating body through which National Lottery funding (Department of Education, Youth Affairs Section) for Traveller community development projects is managed.

Travellers don't tend to use mainstream forms of media to represent, express themselves or indeed highlight their concerns or issues etc. However the magazine now serves the Traveller community on a number of levels. For example, as a community based medium by which Travellers can communicate with each other and express themselves (many for the first time) through their writings, articles photography, poetry etc. It also forms a media resource that can provide positive awareness about the Traveller lifestyle, values, customs and traditions and is an aid to those who work with or wish to learn about the Travelling community.

The magazine also publishes information regarding a variety of events / happenings that could have impact on the Traveller community, for example government policies, decisions, education/ training courses, seminars, meetings, community development initiatives as well as giving notices of births, marriages, deaths, etc.

As the vast majority of material which we print comes directly from the Travelling community the magazine is instrumental in raising the self esteem of both the contributors and the overall community which leads to a sense of empowerment.

Because it is a print medium it also serves as a useful literacy aid. Traveller children and adults can be encouraged to develop their literacy and writing skills, by contributing material for print and participating in the competitions which we feature from time to time.

Because it is a print medium it also serves as a useful literacy aid. Traveller children and adults can be encouraged to develop their literacy and writing skills by contributing material for print and participating in the competitions which we feature from time to time.

Because we are aware of the low levels of literacy among the Travelling people, we place a lot of emphasis on using photographs and colour, so that people are not confronted, or excluded, by page after page of printed word only.

The main source of funding/ income for the project is National Lottery Funding. The budget covers everything: publishing four magazines, wages, office, equipment, postage, phone etc. Subscriptions to the magazine help towards the costs. People can take out an annual subscription that includes postage and packaging of the magazine.

We have an open policy to publication for those who wish to contribute material and, unless material submitted for publication is deemed very controversial, slanderous or has possible copyright or legal repercussions will be considered for publication. Present contributors and subscribers to the magazine include trainees in Traveller Centres, womens' groups, youth and community groups, Traveller pre-schools, libraries, social workers, community development projects, university students and individuals, some as far away as Australia!

**Winnie McDonagh,
Co-ordinator Voice of the Traveller,
11 Main Street ,
Finglas,
Dublin 11,
Phone: 01-864 1985**

DARING TO BE RADICAL

Although many feminist publications are no longer up and running, their power remains: they are the only written record of some of the most exciting activities of women's groups during the turbulent 70s/80s, writes Catherine Couvert of *Women's News*.

Anyone remember *Banshee, WICCA, Gaining Ground, Saor Bhean*? We have a few, now very rare, copies of these 70s/ early 80's newsletters in our office, and I treasure them. They are a link to women who pioneered the work we are doing now, daring to be radical and helping to bring about important changes in society.

Feminist publications in Ireland, small, cheaply produced, often short-lived, could easily be dismissed. This would be a terrible mistake. They are sometimes the only written records of some of the most exciting activities of women's groups.

Reports on women in Ireland and on some of what makes them tick may be relatively commonplace in mainstream media, but you will be hard-pressed to find consistent reporting on what is being done to improve their situation, or to work towards a more egalitarian society.

Working class women, marginalised women, black women or lesbians may be avid readers of traditional women's magazines, but they are rarely represented in them, except in a trivialised way. Alternative women's publications are important for women's groups, to swap ideas and remind themselves that they are not lonely voices in the wilderness.

Women's News, the Belfast-based magazine I work for, has been in existence since 1984. It was run on a voluntary basis until last year when it received some temporary funding which has allowed it to grow. Now, women are beginning to see it in newsagents around the country, though many still don't know it exists.

Its readership is around 3,000, growing slowly but steadily. Its contributors are numerous and varied. It is an exciting place to be: I have freedom of expression as a journalist, can develop alternative forms of training and be part of a team of great women.

The idea behind *Women's News* is ambitious: to encourage self-expresion and creativity, to be an organ for communication between groups, to give a voice to marginalised women, to keep up to date with feminist thinking and to reflect the diversity of the movement throughout Ireland.

From the start, we have tried to avoid censorship. This has sometimes led to difficulties. We regularly feel the contradictions of reflecting the politics of grassroots community women's groups while giving lesbian women and radical feminists their place, or of obtaining contributions from Protestant communities while not censoring out Republican women.

In the last two years, we have concentrated on building up a better idea of what community women's groups need from us and on lightening up what used to be a sometimes heavy theoretical magazine.

I like the result: it is now more interesting for me to read, it reflects many different aspects of women's thinking, it combines TV stars, activists and women from your neighbourhood. It entertains me, challenges and manages to surprise me on a regular basis: I hope it can keep on doing this for more and more women for many years to come!

**Catherine Couvert,
*Women's News***
**30 Donegall Street
Belfast BT1 2GQ
Phone: (08) 01232-322823
e-mail:
womensnews@dnet.co.uk**

SNIPBITS

Sexual Health

The detailed and explicit television coverage of the White House sex scandal has been a big help to Kate Langrall Folb. That is because the non-profit activist spends a good deal of her time trying to persuade key decision makers in the entertainment industry to include reliable information about sexuality and productive health in their programming.

From: The Chronicle of Philanthropy, Issue Nov 1998

Global Growth

Spending of non-profit groups in 22 nations exceeds $1-trillion and is growing rapidly, says a global team of researchers. As complex social problems around the world challenge the capacities of governments and businesses, non-profit organisations are growing rapidly in number and influence, according to a new report.

From: The Chronicle of Philanthropy, Issue Nov 1998

ARE WE SERIOUS ABOUT ACCESS?

'ACCESS', 'participation', 'empowerment' These are some of the buzz words bandied about at licence hearings, conferences and in funding applications, but what do they mean and how serious are we in our commitment to them? This viewpoint focuses on the question of access. **Rosemary Day, lecturer in Media and Communication Studies at the University of Limerick,** urges community media activists to continuously reassess the extent to which community access is facilitated and encouraged in their organisations.

All community media proclaim that they are owned by the community in which they are rooted, that they are not-for-profit and that they ensure open access for the members of that community. Community media strive for change in society.

In Ireland these changes are mainly social - to encourage and facilitate full participation in community life, at all levels, for all people.

In order to effect change in society, community media seek to empower people, to give them the chance to speak to themselves and to do so in ways that are not mediated by bureaucracy or by the constraints of the market. This is done mainly through open access.

Access can be viewed on at least four levels: access to information; access to airtime; access to skills; and access to social power.

The first three can be fulfilled, to a certain extent, by public or commercial media and by state or private education but it is the last one that defines the community station and sets it apart. Only the community media can empower people to change the community in which they live and, through doing so, society.

Community radio is accessible to anyone and everyone within the community. It is, therefore, one step closer to the people as it is not "produced" or packaged for them but is produced and presented by them. Community radio is broadcast by the people to the people, community programming by another agency is talking for or about or at its very best with the people.

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) Africa put it like this recently: *"It is the media in which the communities participate as planners, producers and performers and it is the means of expression of the community, rather than for the community"*

"Community" programmes on national or local radio and television can showcase the local community to the nation or to the region, but they cannot allow or give access to members of a community to talk to each other, to define themselves, or to be the cause of changes in their living patterns, conditions or society. Access programming in the public and commercial sectors is restricted; it is not the primary aim of such stations. In those instances access is given or allowed, it is controlled by some higher authority and mediated by the professionals. Community media offers continuous and open access, people can keep coming back. If they do not, the organisations lose their raison d'etre.

The fact that community access is one of the most fundamental principles on which any community medium operates can be forgotten in the daily rush to fill schedules and in the need to find finances and keep entertainment to the fore. These principles can easily become platitudes – something stuck up on the wall as part of a mission statement that does not get translated into practice.

It is most important that community media activists – voluntary workers, board members and paid staff – constantly interrogate the management structures, working procedures and modes of production and communication links to see how these principles are being put into practice in their station/ group.

Rosemary Day has recently been elected to the General Council of AMARC Europe and is a board member of Foinse. She was one of the original founders of Raidio na Life, Dublin and of Wired FM, Limerick.

Footnotes:
Bonin & Opoku-Mensah, (ed) 1998, What is Community Radio? A Resource Guide, AMARC Africa & Panos

COMMUNITY MEDIA NETWORK IN COLLABORATION WITH PAVEE POINT AND THE IRISH REFUGEE COUNCIL PRESENT

A Day at the Races
An Anti-Rascist Project

The Poison in our Roots
part one

Video available from CMN, 34 North Frederick St, Dublin 1, Ph: Joyce Henaku @ 01- 878 3344

PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED

"As a result of the said publication, the plaintiff has been greatly injured in his credit and reputation and in his office as aforesaid and has been brought into public odium, hatred, ridicule and contempt."

The above paragraph, or a similar one including the words "hatred", "ridicule" and "contempt" signals a writ for defamation or libel. It is vital that those working in journalism understand what is and what is not defamatory and what constitutes an actionable libel. According to the Eoin Ronayne, Assistant Secretary (Ireland) NUJ, *Libel Law*, written by Damian McHugh, is an essential book for journalists trying to work within the current libel laws. Here we reprint some of its basic do's and don'ts, and recommend that you invest in a copy .

So, what is it?

Libel is the legal name for defamatory words written, printed, or otherwise permanently represented (such as in a painting or effigy).

A classic definition was provided by the Irish courts in 1971 which has been followed ever since:

> "Defamation is the wrongful publication of a false statement about a person, which tends to lower that person in the eyes of right-thinking members of society or tends to hold that person up to hatred, ridicule or contempt, or causes that person to be shunned or avoided by right-thinking members of society."

The truth of the matter!

Libel is not a question of truth and falsehood. The old adage "The greater the truth the greater the libel" holds good. In certain cases the truth of a libellous matter, if it can be proved to the satisfaction of a court, may relieve the defendants from legal liability; but such justification is entirely a question of evidence and may be very difficult and costly to establish. The journalist, whether reporter, sub-editor or editor, who ok's a libel because he or she believes in the truth of the matter, is asking for trouble.

Mistake is no defense

The question you must ask yourself is: "Are these words capable of a defamatory meaning?" The golden rule is: When in doubt leave out. Guidelines: Mistake is no defence Four classes of comments which are always highly dangerous because they give the plaintiff a good right of action are:

The journalist's motive and intention matters little. It will not help the defendant on the day of the trial to plead that he acted as the guardian of public morality or as the protector of the wronged. It is just possible that in awarding damages a jury may pay some attention to the motive actuating the publication of the libel. But the jury may not, and it is, therefore, unsafe to bank on the possibility. Neither will it help the defendant to plead that he was the victim of an honest mistake or that he was misinformed.

The reasonable person test

The test of what is defamatory is the objective "reasonable person" test. Except in the small number of cases which are tried in the Circuit Court - where a judge sitting alone decides the action - the "reasonable person" is a High Court jury. The jury, with guidance from the judge will decide that issue and also the amount of damages which the plaintiff should be awarded.

The essential ingredients of defamation are:
The words must refer to the plaintiff
The words must be published to a third party
The words must be defamatory or capable of being defamatory

There are some examples of the way the judicial mind views cases of libel, taken from the ***The Irish Law of Torts*** **by Bryan M E McMahon and William Binchy:**

* A suggestion made by an auctioneer that the plaintiff had not acted in accordance with the high traditions of his profession as a solicitor was accepted as being defamatory.

* To say of a well-known professional footballer that he never used his right foot in kicking the ball because he was unable to do so was capable of being defamatory if it was not true.

* To impute that the plaintiff made deliberate false statements to a local corporation, and that the plaintiff was unfit for public office was also held to be defamatory.

* To accuse a person wrongfully of theft is defamatory.

* In England, it has been held libellous and actionable to say of a man that he is insane.

* It was held libellous and actionable to say that a man was a bigot in religious matters.

However, it was held not libellous of a layman that he "knows no law" but to say it of a lawyer would be highly defamatory as reflecting upon him in his profession.

Malice: Malice is not an essential element of libel. Even where there has been an absence of ill-will or spite or of libellous intention, damages may be awarded. The most innocent-looking words may be held defamatory if they fail the "reasonable person" test in the minds of the jurors or the judge.

Indirect libel - innuendo

It is not only be direct statement that a libel may be conveyed. An apparent innocent remark may be held to be defamatory because of a hidden meaning which the words carry. Where the words complained of are *prima facie* innocent, the plaintiff must prove that the words have a secondary meaning which makes them defamatory.

Generally, any words which reflect on the plaintiff's moral, intellectual or professional character are libellous and may give rise to grounds for an action in damages.

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY NETWORKS USING TECHNOLOGY

The CEDIS project, managed by CMN, aims to create, within a group of community-related initiatives, the capacity to use the internet and related resources effectively to address disadvantage and exclusion. Sinéad Casey, Cedis Co-ordinator describes the work of the project to date.

There are 25 projects participating in CEDIS and 22 of those are Community Development Programme projects. Hands-on training at 21 of the 25 participant projects has taken place and a total of 61 people have received between 8 and 14 hours of training. Training was originally intended to take place exclusively online. However, it was unreasonable to expect that participants who were very unfamiliar with IT would be comfortable initially with this type of approach. At the request of the participating projects, hands-on training became the focus for the initial stages of the project. Stage 2 of the project, involving participant organisations' development of a strategic plan for networking, leads directly into Stage 3 where projects become involved in a chosen assignment which will reflect the priorities identified in Stage 2.

The third stage of the project is actually the most interesting and challenging. It allows participants to be creative in developing ways that they can use the internet, not only to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently, but to investigate ways that IT might allow them to engage in brand new activities. This means that an assignment might involve anything from information gathering to develop a data base, developing a web page to increase visibility and share information, networking online with other organisations to collaborate on a specific project, getting involved in lobbying.

CEDIS is a pilot project and is a part funded under the European Union's *Information Society Activity Centre* Programme. There are two transnational partners, one in Greece and one in Italy. The project in Rome is working with immigrant populations in the city and networking them with other immigrant groups as well as groups from their countries of origin. The project in Athens is working with environmental action groups. CEDIS Ireland is the only one of the three projects which has a national as opposed to citywide scope. Transnational activities are an important part of the project as the aim is to share experiences and to develop a body of best practises which will allow future similar projects to be as effective as possible.

The community voluntary sector in Ireland is currently undergoing a period of transition, from state and EU-supported growth, to a more self-conscious and self-sustaining phase. The development of coalitions and networks, as well as lobbying for appropriate structures, is likely to be a major part of this. CEDIS output will hopefully contribute to this process and hence to the long-term shape and future of the sector itself.

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CEDIS

The Video Activist Handbook,

Thomas Harding,
Pluto Press London

For any community or social activist with access to a camcorder, The Video Activist Handbook should serve as an inspiration to begin shooting, editing and screening the struggles they are involved in. Written by Thomas Harding of the undercurrents alternative video news collective, it distills years of experience using video to document the front line of direct action in Britain.

The book is full of anecdotal wisdom and includes many exciting and successful examples of how camcorders have been used to defend people in court, prosecute polluting factories or spread the message of important local campaigns to an international audience.

The handbook is organised coherently - separate chapters demystify readily learned processes, from shooting and editing on available technology (even if it means editing with tow videos or the camcorder itself) to organising popular screenings at community centres, libraries or festivals. Advice given has been arrived at through years of trial and error, and dilemmas that face a video activist are discussed through case studies.

Methodologies of working with campaigning groups are discussed, beginning with gaining trust as a dependable witness, to assisting groups in shooting and editing their own studies. And strategies for broadcasting your work such as selling amateur footage to local and national TV stations are also shared - with the intention that powerful images of resistance may gain a potential audience of millions.

The routine police brutality against the black communities of Los Angeles was sealed in amber when four LAPD officers were video taped truncheoning Rodney King as he lay on the ground. This amateur footage discredited the LAPD internationally, and ignited the greatest urban rising America has seen since the sixties.

The camcorder has the potential to record acts of social injustice and with it the video activist can document and spread powerful images unlikely to be seen in the mainstream media. With so much of the world's media concentrated in the hands of a few, a grassroots media movement is necessary. This handbook is an excellent contribution to its formation.

Joe Carolan

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EMPOWERMENT VIA INTEGRA

"This is an exciting project. Its a chance for community organisations to develop their own media products and to create lasting community media enterprises," writes Iris Lyle, Co-ordinator of Building Community Media in Ireland, CMN's new media training project funded by the European Union's Integra Initiative and match-funded by Irish media organisations. Here she reports on its progress

Eighteen community organisations in Dublin, Cork, Leitrim and Cavan are receiving training in radio, photography and video. The aim is to give communities tools to help themselves. After acquiring practical skills, participants will work with their community organisation to produce a media product of benefit to their community. Organisations will be supported to set up an ongoing community media initiative and will be encouraged to participate in the current Irish and European debate on technological developments in the media. It is hoped that a strong lobby will emerge in favour of community media.

The project launch in October was attended by representatives from the 18 community organisations. Jack Byrne of NEAR FM and Sean O Siochru, Chair of CMN gave scene-setting presentations describing what community media is about. This was followed by a Media Fair, which gave the participants a chance to try out the different technologies, with the assistance of the project trainers. The second day focussed on the media as message with a presentation from Dublin in Depth and feedback and evaluation from the participants.

A theme for all Integra projects, and for all European funded training programmes is "empowerment." What does this buzzword mean? The European Commission has stated that training programmes, aiming to combat unemployment, should be planned and carried out in a way that empowers the participants. This is the "bottom up" approach. This can mean different things to different people. Arguably the European Commission is merely advocating the "positive action training" model as practised for years by women's training projects and some community training organisations. Here is the definition of the positive action training model put forward by the UK Women's Training Network.

"Positive action includes awareness of diversity, identification of barriers to access, providing resources to alleviate obstacles and meet needs, incorporation of evaluation and feedback, responding flexibly and dynamically, promoting dialogue and partnerships." WTN Review 1996.

In brief, you offer person centred training, which starts from where someone is at, and builds skills and confidence from there. It was East Leeds Women's Workshop in England who persuaded the European Commission back in 1981 to pay participants' childcare costs. Lack of money to pay for childcare is after all, the first obstacle faced by unemployed women who want a job. It was a very significant victory and now many training projects funded with European money offer a childcare allowance to parents. Studies undertaken for the European Commission by Professor Teresa Rees of the University of Bristol have shown that the positive action training model is relevant to the labour market and is successful in transforming women's lives. This model is now being advocated for other groups excluded from the labour market.

My experience is this: the model works. I have worked previously on EU funded training programmes and until recently I was Co-ordinator of a European project which aimed to facilitate access for women to the construction industry. (Forum: European Tradeswomen's Network). The model can work particularly well if the target participants are involved in the project design from day one. A dynamic training project that is owned by everyone can evolve if real participation is ensured, such as representation of participants on the project steering group with shared decision making on training content, project direction and management. In the Forum project some 60 Tradeswomen working in three London local authorities elected 6 representatives onto a management committee and they then took a full role in directing the project.

Building Community Media in Ireland is an ambitious project, but it can succeed if CMN, trainers and participants work creatively together in a mutually co-operative and supportive way. It is important to have ongoing feedback from everyone as the project develops, and for that feedback to be incorporated into the ongoing project development and delivery. Evaluation tools being used are written questionnaires and discussion in training groups, workshops and conferences. An external consultant has been contracted to oversee the evaluation activities.

The next big event for the project will be a two day conference on January 21 and 22 in Dublin.

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WEAPONS OF MASS INFORMATION

The written word is a potent weapon whether it is in the form of flooding a particular administration with protest letters for the release of a prisoner of conscience or awareness campaigns though literature and poster distribution to highlight human rights abuses

Amnesty uses its literature and media profile to familiarise us with cases of human rights abuses throughout the world. Amnesty advocates vigilance of human rights abuses within our own system of criminal justice and urges social movement organisations to campaign to pressurise governments in order to influence other states involved in human rights abuses.

In particular, Amnesty's strategy of highlighting individual cases of abuse, brings home the personal aspect of the word 'oppression' . For instance, Amnesty has expressed alarm at recent reports that four employees of the Iranian daily newspaper *TOUS* were arrested in September 1998. According to the reports, Mashallah Shamsolva'esin, Hamid Reza Jalaipour, Mohammad Javadi Hessar and Ibrahim Nabar were detained following the publication of an article questioning the policies of the Iranian government in Afghanistan and its recent military build up on Iran's eastern boarders.

Amnesty has also published the case of a Syrian woman, Doha 'Ashur-al-' Askari, who is serving a six-year prison sentence with hard labour in Duma woman's prison in Damascus. She was convicted, after a grossly unfair trial, of affiliation to the Party of Community Action (PCA). Her legitimate right to express her opinion was branded an 'act of terrorism' although she stressed she was only involved in writing articles and reading PCA literature.

As Amnesty'a campaign has proven, having influenced numerous prisoner releases, the power of the protest letter is real. But it is also a fundamental and essential human right and with the development of communication technology and the increase of access to email, it is possible to envisage a global protest against injustice taking place over the internet.

Technology has also facilitated a growth in the number of alternative publications in Ireland that deal with social injustice and human rights issues. An yet it is easy to imagine that their potential to inform educate and bring about social change could be minimised by them becoming bogged down in their own agenda and failing to network and promate common issues.

Laurence Cox, lecturer at the Centre for Research on Environment and Community, Waterford argues that *'connecting through Networking is an obvious link for a social movement which draws on a shared movement identity and on a shared movement culture'.*

There is a definite need for different groups engaged in social activism to communicate with each other in order to extend and observe the rights of others on a global level.

Irene Quinn
Brenda McNally

ONE MILLION SIGNATURES, ONE POWERFUL MESSAGE

Fifty years ago, the leaders of 56 independent states agreed to a code of conduct outlining the rights and duties of all human beings and entrusted the protection and promotion of these rights, primarily, to those governments. This agreement, known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has yet to produce a world in which all citizens feel equally protected, regardless of their creed, colour, gender or political views.

Driven by political expediency and self-interest, governments throughout the world continue to abuse and exploit the rights' of citizens in order to maintain power and privilege for the few. Despite the euphoria heralded by the signing of the Declaration of Human Rights on December, 10, 1998, we have yet to see a world without the cruelty and injustice promised by those governments.

The declaration has been called 'the worlds best kept secret' in spite of government consensus to actively promote it whenever possible. Mr Pierre Sane, AI Secretary General commented in Amnesty's recent annual report that *'our current campaign to promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the run up to the Dec 10th anniversary hopes to change all that. We owe it to the victims, their families and future generations to ensure that the next 50 years really do see that promise of a better world realised'.*

Amnesty International (Irish Section) challenged the people of Ireland to collect a colossal ONE MILLION signatures with the campaign slogan: ONE MILLION SIGNATURES, ONE POWERFUL MESSAGE. The Sign for Human Rights campaign was part of a world-wide drive to collect millions of signatures in support of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These signatures then formed part of the **Worlds Biggest Book** which was presented to the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in Paris on December 10th 1998.

Ireland sent a powerful message to all the governments of the world that human rights do matter.

Irene Quinn

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POSTBOX

A Chara,

The two independent local radio stations in Dublin both have "late night talk shows" - where the presenter will throw a subject into the air and then invite people to phone in with their opinions. This all sounds very constructive and worthwhile in theory but it never seems to turn out that way.

The type of question put to the listener would be something like "which is the worst area in Dublin to live?" This type of rhetorical question is almost immediately inflammatory but it could be approached from a different angle, such as: why are there so many deprived areas of Dublin? This would almost certainly be the approach of many Community Radio Stations.

By throwing contentious subjects into the air, for example programs regularly deal with unemployment, drug related crime, unwanted pregnancies and deprived areas of Dublin, the presenter will then orchestrate two callers with opposing views to air their grievances at each other and over the airwaves. This inevitably deteriorates into a verbal boxing match, which is all very entertaining, even hedonistic, for the listener, but no one is any the wiser when the presenter says in a patronising tone "we will have to leave it there and we will be back after this commercial break". This always feels to me, as if the radio station is manipulating the listener.

If community radio stations were to address the issues mentioned above, they would no doubt invite people into the studio and have detailed and constructive debates. The discussions would also be facilitated in a concise manner without anyone flying off the handle by ranting and raving and turning themselves into caricatures as they often do on independent local commercial radio.

Andrew Sansom, Building Community Media, Radio Project Worker

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